

600 honorable Foreign Service officers are going to be used as political pawns in a crusade to keep Hillary Clinton from being elected President. I hope he will drop his opposition to career diplomats and other important nominations so we can give these good people the promotions they have earned.

As I travel the world through these many years, Madam President, I always go to the embassies, and I always ask them to see as many of the staff there as possible. I tell them there is no finer group of people representing America today than our Foreign Service corps, and I stand by that. It is a shame that I have to come to the floor and talk about this. We should pass these nominations tonight with no further delay.

Would the Chair tell us the schedule of today's business in the Senate.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2029, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2029) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Kirk/Tester amendment No. 2763, in the nature of a substitute.

Kirk amendment No. 2764 (to amendment No. 2763), to clarify the term "congressional defense committees."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 5:30 p.m. will be equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I will defer my remarks until the chairman of the VA-MILCON appropriations subcommittee comes, and after he speaks, I will.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. TESTER. Thank you, Madam President.

It will be some time before Senator KIRK arrives, so I do want to give my remarks for the purpose of other folks who would like to talk about this bill.

I rise today along with Senator KIRK to usher the legislation through this

Chamber, the VA-MILCON appropriations bill, as quickly as possible. I want to thank Senator KIRK for his work on this bill. As I said last week when we began debating the VA-MILCON appropriations bill, this legislation has huge significance. It marks a good-faith effort on behalf of this body to move forward with an appropriations bill that responsibly invests in our national security, our economy, and our country.

I also think that, among all the appropriations bills to move forward, it is right and just that a bill to honor our commitment to our Nation's veterans be the first one to break the gridlock.

I recognize that the VA-MILCON appropriations bill that came out of the committee last spring fell far short of what the VA needs to provide the care our veterans have earned. But now that Congress has passed the budget agreement, we have crafted a substitute amendment that will bring this bill closer to where it has to be to meet the needs of the brave men and women who have served this country. This amendment will provide an additional \$1.9 billion for VA medical services. This amendment fixes a flawed bill.

The bill passed out of the committee in May grossly shortchanged our veterans and undermined the ability of the VA employees to do their jobs, and that is one of the reasons I voted against it. Now, 6 months later, we are about to right the committee's wrong and make investments that we have known all along the VA needs. The money will help allow the VA to address an increased demand for hepatitis C treatments, bolster health care for rural veterans, and will ensure that we can better recruit and retain VA doctors and nurses in every State of the Union. It also provides better care for Vietnam veterans who are reaching retirement age and treats the physical and mental ailments of veterans returning home after 15 years of war in the Middle East. These are investments the VA desperately needs to do its job.

Now, I know the VA has been under a microscope, and it should be. It is responsible for honoring a promise, and when that promise is broken, we need to do more than to say "I am sorry." We need to fix it. This substitute amendment before the Senate will begin to right these wrongs, and you have my word that I and others will be scrutinizing how every dollar is spent because we can't afford to make these investments without knowing they are producing real results for the courageous servicemembers who have earned it.

Colleagues are encouraged to provide amendments in a timely manner because we all would like to pass this bill before Veterans Day. Once we pass the bill, it will prove we are serious about living up to promises that we make to our Nation's veterans. It will empower VA employees to do their jobs and provide veterans with the care they have earned.

It is not just health care. This bill will improve consideration of com-

pensation claims for injuries suffered during their service. It gives the VA the tools to maintain our national cemetery system. It supports the Office of the Inspector General, which we need in order to ensure that the VA is living up to the demands that we have placed upon it.

It adds \$170 million for military construction. These funds will go toward additional projects to enhance our military readiness, particularly for the Air Force and its Reserve elements, and it will set the stage for future appropriations bills that responsibly invest in education, energy, infrastructure, and in our public lands.

I am very happy that we are considering this bill today. Hopefully, we can finish this bill tomorrow, as we should. It will take some cooperation, but I think the Senate is finally ready for some cooperation. I look forward to that.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I am back on the floor once again for my "Waste of the Week." I have been doing this for well over 20 weeks—highlighting waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' money. It is said we cannot afford to cut another dime, that programs are too important.

I question that since the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and the congressional accounting office have all looked at various Federal programs and said: Why in the world are you doing this in the first place? It is no longer relevant. It is a waste of money. The function has already been taken care of.

Today we are going to highlight yet another situation where this money ought to be going into either higher priority uses—such as Department of Defense or funding soldiers or veterans or something such as that—or not take it from the taxpayer in the first place. And as we document each week, our account keeps growing in terms of money that falls clearly into the category of waste, fraud, and abuse.

Today's situation is a little bit different because the money is not being spent. Then the question is, OK, it is reserved for something, right? It was, but that action has been fulfilled. So why is that money still sitting there and who is using it or if it is not being used, why isn't it redirected and returned to the taxpayer?

Let me talk about this program.

Throughout our Nation's history, the United States has pursued various paths of energy development in order